

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 00181 01 OF 03 101630Z
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: OREP (ZABLOCKI, CLEMENT J.)
SUBJ: CODEL ZABLOCKI VISIT TO DAMASCUS

SUMMARY: IN TWO-DAY VISIT, CODEL ZABLOCKI HAD EXTENDED MEETINGS WITH SYRIAN LEADERSHIP, CONCENTRATING ON PEACE PROCESS AND IN PARTICULAR ON PALESTINIAN ISSUE AND SADAT'S INITIATIVES. FONMIN KHADDAM PRESENTED RIGID SYRIAN POSITIONS SOME OF WHICH APPEARED TO BE A RETREAT FROM UN RES 242 FRAMEWORK FOR GENEVA. KHADDAM INDICATED THAT SYRIA CANNOT DESTROY HIS INITIATIVE. PRESIDENT ASSAD CONTRADICTED HIS FONMIN ON ONE OR TWO POINTS, BUT IN MORE MODERATE TONES CONFIRMED SYRIA'S "STEADFASTNESS." ALL IN LEADERSHIP STRESSED THEIR DESIRE TO WORK FOR CLOSER SYRIAN-US RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. CODEL ZABLOCKI ARRIVED IN DAMASCUS JANUARY 4 FOR A TWO-DAY VISIT WHICH INCLUDED MEETINGS WITH ECON MINISTER
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 00181 01 OF 03 101630Z

(SEPTTEL), PEOPLE'S COUNCIL PRESIDENT, LEADERS OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY (DAMASCUS 0096), ARAFAT (PRIVATELY ARRANGED BY REPRESENTATIVE FINDLEY -SEPTTEL), FOREIGN MINISTER, AND PRESIDENT. CODEL HAS COMPLETE TRANSCRIPTS OF MEETINGS WITH MIN ECONOMY, FONMIN AND PRESIDENT. THIS MESSAGE SUMMARIZES HIGH POINTS OF VISIT TO COUNCIL AND MEETINGS WITH KHADDAM AND ASSAD. THOS MEETINGS WERE MARKED BY DEGREE OF CANDOR

AND FRANKNESS AND AT TIMES HEAT WHICH MEMBERS OF CODEL SAID THEY HAD NOT FOUND ELSEWHERE. CODEL WAS BRIEFED ON ARRIVAL BY AMBASSADOR AND USAID DIRECTOR. DISCUSSIONS CENTERED ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS AND CODEL THEN PROCEEDED TO MEETING WITH MINECONOMY IMADI.

2. THE FOLLOWING MORNING CODEL MET WITH COUNTERPARTS AT THE PEOPLE'S COUNCIL AND RECEIVED THEIR FIRST PRESENTATION OF THE DAY ON THE ESSENTILITY OF A JUST SOLUTION FOR THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM AND WHY SYRIA OPPOSED SADAT'S PEACE INITIATIVES. INADEQUATE TRANSLATION AND POOR ACOUSTICS ADDED TO THE CONFUSION OF THE EXCHANGE, LEAVING THE CODEL UNSTATISFIED WITH THE ANSWERS TO ITS BASIITTDSTION OF WHY SYRIA OPPOSED SADAT'S INTITIATIVES. AFTER AN HOUR, COUNCIL PRESIDENT AL-HALABI JOINED THE GROUP TO WELCOME THE CODEL AND TO GIVE HIS OWN STRONG EMPHASIS TO THE "PRINCIPLED STANDS" SYRIA IS PURSUING VIS-A-VIS THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS. HE INCLUDED THE ASSERTION, CHALLENGED BY CODEL, THAT DR. BRZEZINSKI HAD STATED SIX MILLION MORE JEWS SHOULD COME TO ISRAEL.

3. KHADDA. CODEL PROCEEDED TO A SCHEDULED ONE AND A HALF HOUR MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER KHADDAM. THIS MEETING STRETCHED TO THREE HOURS AND WAS ONLY TERMINATED, AT AMBASSADOR'S SUGGESTION, WHEN I BECAME CLEAR THAT THE AGREED UPON FOLLOW-ON SESSION WITH PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 00181 01 OF 03 101630Z

WAS NOT GOING TO MATERIALIZE. KHADDAM LED OFF WITH A HALF-HOUR REVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS, FOLLOWED BY AN EQUALLY LONG TRANSLATION. WITH VIGOR AND SOME ELEQUENCE, HE DESCRIBED THE PLIGHT OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND THE NEED TO END ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF ALL TERRITORIES TAKEN OVER IN 1967. HE THEN ASSERTED THAT SADAT'S PEACE INITIATIVES ARE WORKING DIRECTLY OPPOSITE TO THEIR ANNOUNCED PURPOSE. SINCE ISRAEL HAD GIVEN NOTHING TO THE ARABS IN THE COURSE OF THE PAST THIRTY YEARS, IT WOULD BE NIAVE TO EXPECT ISRAEL WOULD RESPOND POSITIVELY TO AN ARAB WORLD WHICH SADAT'S RECENT INITIATIVES HAD SO DEEPLY DIVIDED. ARAB DIGNITY AND HONOR, KHADDAM EMPHASIZED, WERE ESSENTIAL TO ANY JUST PEACE END SINCE SADAT WAS GAMBLING RECKLESSLY WITH BOTH, HE WOULD INYOITABLY LOSE. HE HAD TRIED TO TURN AN ARAB-ISRAELI PROBLEM INTO AN EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI ONE. KHADDAM CONCLUDED WITH A STRONG AFFIRMATION OF HIS INTERST IN SEEING US-SYRIAN BILATERAL RELATIONS STRENGTHEND.

4. CODEL THEN PROBED KHADDAM VIGOROUSLY, PRESSED TO DESCRIBE WHAT WOULD CONSTITUTE A JUST SOLUTION, KHADDAM REPLIED THAT IT WOULD REQUIRE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE

APPLICABLE UN RESOLUTIONS. ASKED TO BE SPECIFIC,
HE NOTED THAT THE 1947 UN PARTITION PLAN SET ASIDE LAND
FOR THE JEWS AND LAND FOR THE ARABS. AT ANOTHER POINT,
HE SAID AN INDEPENDENT PALESTINIAN STATE SHOULD BE CREATED
ON WEST BANK/GAZA AND NON-WEST BANKERS/GAZANS SHOULD HAVE
THE RIGHT TO RETURN TO THEIR ORIGINAL HOMES, WHEREVER THESE
MIGHT BE WITHIN THE PRE-1967 BORDERS OF ISRAEL. KHADDAM
DID NOT RECONCILE THESE DIFFERING VIEWS OF THE TERRITORY
TO BE ALLOTTED TO A PALESTINIAN STATED. HE AFFIRMED THAT
SYRIA ACCEPTED THE EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL AND ADDED THAT ANY
ACCOMMODATIONS TO WHICH THE PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS WERE
ABLE TO AGREE WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE TO SYRIA.

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PAGE 04 DAMASC 00181 01 OF 03 101630Z

KHADDAM DESCRIBED ARAFAT AS MORE REPRESENTATIVE THAN MOST
WORLD LEADERS, HAVING BEEN ELECTED BY THE "PALESTINIANS,
THE ARABS, AND THE UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY." THIS WAS WHO
SYRIAN MAINTAINED ITS ADHERENCE TO THE RABAT RESOLUTION
THAT THEPLO WAS THE SOLE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
PALESTINIANS.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 00181 02 OF 03 101527Z
ACTION H-03

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 2 OF 3 DAMASCUS 0181

6. SADAT

REPEATEDLY, THE FONMIN RETURNED TO THE ATTACK ON SADAT WHO, HE ASSERTED, HAD DESTROYED THE PEACE PROCESS; HE HAD DYNAMITED THE TRAIN AND THE PEACE TRACK. NOW A NEW TRAIN AND TRACK MUST BE BUILT. HE WHO SUPPORTED SADAT WAS JOINING THOSE WHO OPPOSED PEACE. ONLY THREE ARAB COUNTRIES, HE ASSERTED, SUPPORTED SADAT. TWO OF THESE, MOROCCO AND SUDAN, WERE IN EGYPT'S MILITARY DEBT. THE THIRD, OMAN, SUPPORTED CAIRO FOR ITS OWN SELF-INTEREST IN OPPOSITION TO PDRY. KHADDAM SAID; "TODAY IF WE WERE INVITED TO GO TO GENEVA WE WOULD NOT GO IN LIGHT OF THE SADAT VISIT."

7. REPRESENTATIVE BINGHAM COMMENTED THAT HE SENSED IN KHADDAM'S WORDS A "REAL HATRED OF ZIONISM AND OF THE JEWISH STATE IN ISRAEL," AND SAID HE FOUND IT IRONICAL THAT KHADDAM SHOULD HAVE COMPARED, AS HE HAD, HITLER WITH ISRAEL'S LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 00181 02 OF 03 101527Z

LEADERS. KHADDAM, WHO WAS ALREADY WORKING ON EIGHT CYLINDERS, APPARENTLY MISUNDERSTOOD BINGHAM'S USE OF THE WORD "IRONICAL" AS MEANING "MOCKERY" AND EXPLODED: "HOW COULD SYRIA EXPECT TO LOVE ISRAEL WHICH HAD BUTCHERED ARAB WOMEN AND CHILDREN?" SAID THAT HE WAS NOT SURPRISED BY THE LINE OF QUESTIONING BECAUSE HE KNEW THERE WAS ANTI-ARAB SENTIMENT IN CONGRESS. CHAIRMAN ZABLOCKI INTERRUPTED TO SAY THERE MIGHT BE IGNORANCE OF THE SYRIAN AND ARAB POSITION IN GENERAL, BUT IT WAS WRONG TO TERM THIS ANTI-ARAB. ACKNOWLEDGING COMMUNICATION HAD BEEN INADEQUATE, KHADDAM SAID THERE WAS ALSO THE PROBLEM THAT ARABS WERE OFTEN TOO COURTEOUS IN SPEAKING TO AMERICANS. THIS, RATHER THAN HELPING MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, ONLY COMPLICATED AFFAIRS.

8. ASKED WHETHER SYRIA WOULD ENTER INTO NORMAL RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL, ONCE A PEACE AGREEMENT WAS SIGNED. KHADDAM REPLIED IN THE NEGATIVE, AFFIRMING THIS WAS AN ATTRIBUTE OF SOVEREIGNTY WHICH NO PEACE TREATY AND NO HISTORICAL PRECEDENT REQUIRED. REPRESENTATIVE CAVANNAUGH COMMENTED THAT ARABS SEEMED TO HAVE AN EXCELLENT VISION OF THE PAST BUT NOT A VERY GOOD ONE OF THE FUTURE. AS FAR AS HE COULD SEE, SYRIA DESIRED NOTHING BUT SADAT'S DESTRUCTION. KHADDAM ANSWERED THAT CAVANAUGH "WAS NOT TOO WRONG IN HIS CONCLUSION AND WE SHALL DO THAT BECAUSE SADAT HAS DESTROYED EFFORTS FOR PEACE." AFFIRMING THAT ONLY THE ARABS HAD SHOWN FLEXIBILITY IN THE SEARCH FOR PEACE SINCE 1948, KHADDAM SAID THE US MUST TRY TO MOVE THE ISRAELIS.

9. KHADDAM CONCLUDED WITH ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT HE HAD FOUND THE EXCHANGE EXTREMELY USEFUL, DESPITE THE DIVISIONS BETWEEN US AND SYRIAN VIEWS. HE REAFFIRMED SYRIA'S "KEEN" DESIRE TO DEVELOP ITS RELATIONS WITH THE STATES AND ITS INTENT TO HELP DEVELOP SOUND NEGOTIATIONS FOR PEACE. THE CHAIRMAN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 00181 02 OF 03 101527Z

OF THE SYRIAN FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE COMMENTED TO THE AMBASSADOR AFTER THE MEETING THAT KHADDAM HAD CONFIDED TO HIM HOW MUCH HE HAD IN FACT ENJOYED THE EXCHANGE, ADDING SOMEWHAT WISTFULLY: "I WISH WE HAD FRIENDS LIKE THAT IN CONGRESS." CODEL'S REACTION TO KHADDAM WAS MIXED. SEVERAL SAID THEY FOUND IT VALUABLE AS THEIR FIRST EXPOSURE TO THE DEPTH OF ARAB FEELING ABOUT ISRAELI POLICY. OTHERS WERE CLEARLY PUT OFF BY SEVERAL OF KHADDAM'S POINTS AND MOST REMAINED PUZZLED BY THE VIRULENCE OF HIS ANTI-SADAT POSUTRE.

10. ASSAD.

PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD MET WITH CODEL ZABLOCKI JANUARY 6, JUST PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE, FOR ONE AND A HALF HOURS IN A GENERALLY CONSTRUCTIVE, NON-POLEMICAL MEETING. ASSAD SAID THAT SYRIA WELCOMES AND ENCOURAGES ECONOMIC COOPERATION BETWEEN OUR COUNTRIES. HE AFFIRMED THAT THERE WAS NO POLITICAL LINKAGE AFFECTING US ECONOMIC INVESTMENT. ASSAD EMPHASIZED THAT SYRIA TRIES TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT OF BILATERAL COOPERATION ON THE ONE HAND AND WHAT IS HAPPENING REGARDING AREA PEACE ON THE OTHER. ASSAD DETAILED HIS FAMILIAR POSITION ON THE SADAT INITIATIVE AND SAID THAT IT DESTROYED EFFORTS FOR PEACE. HE SAID THAT THE US ADMINISTRATION MAY HAVE A DIFFERENT VIEW BUT NOTED THAT SO FAR THERE HAD BEEN NO DIRECT DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN HIM AND THE ADMINISTRATION (SIC). HE OBSERVED THAT AMERICANS ARE NOT DIRECTLY INVOLVED AND THEREFORE CANNOT APPRECIATE THE HUMILIATION SADAT CAUSED TO THE ARAB PEOPLE.

11. ASSAD ADDED: "PRESIDENT SADAT HAS DEALT WITH QUESTIONS HE HAS NO RIGHT TO DEAL WITH ALONE. AS OF NOW, HE CAN CONCLUDE A SEPARATE AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL AND HE SEEMS READY TO DO SO. BUT HE IS UNABLE TO REACH A COMPREHENSIVE PEACE WITH ISRAEL. HE CAN PUT AN END TO THE EGYPTIAN ASPECT OF THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT NOT TO THE WHOLE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT. AND ULTIMATELY, IF THE WHOLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 04 DAMASC 00181 02 OF 03 101527Z

ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT IS NOT ENDED THEN THE EGYPTIAN ASPECT
WILL NOT BE ENDED BECAUSE IF CONFLICT BREAKS OUT BETWEEN
ANY ARABS AND ISRAEL, EGYPT MUST INTERVENE REGARDLESS
OF ANY AGREEMENTS IT MAY HAVE MADE. THIS DOES NOT DEPEND
ON RULERS. IT RESULTS FROM THE FACT THAT WE ARE NOT
DIFFERENT NATIONS."

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 00181 03 OF 03 101629Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 3 OF 3 DAMASCUS 0181

12. REPRESENTATIVE FASCELL POINTED OUT THAT FOREIGN MINISTER
KHADDAM CLAIMED SYRIAN POLICY REQUIRED A RETURN TO THE 1947
PARTITION PLAN. ASSAD DISMISSED THIS AS "TALK OF HISTORY"
AND POINTED OUT THAT SYRIA HAD ADHERED TO THE RABAT
CONFERENCE AND SUBSEQUENT DECISIONS WHICH SAID THAT THE
PALESTINIAN STATE WOULD BE COMPOSED OF THE WEST BANK AND
GAZA. HE ADDED THAT THERE IS, OF COURSE, A REFUGEE PROBLEM
IN THAT THIS MINI-STATE COULD NOT ABSORB ALL THE REFUGEES.
THUS, REFUGEES NOT OF WEST BANK/GAZA ORIGIN HAD TO HAVE
THEIR RIGHT RESPECTED TO RETURN TO THEIR HOMES.

13. REPRESENTATIVE BINGHAM SPOKE OF HIS CONCERN BOUT THE
RIGHT OF SYRIAN JEWS TO EMIGRATE TO THE US. ASSAD SAID
THAT JEWISH CITIZENS HAVE THE SAME RIGHT AS ANY SYRIAN
CITIZENS, NONE OF WHOM HAVE THE RIGHT 916SB ISRAEL.(#)
HE RECALLED HIS 1975 UNDERTAKING THAT IF THE US
WOULD PASS LEGISLATION PREVENTING SYRIAN CITIZENS WHO

WENT TO THE STATES FROM RE-EMIGRATING TO ISRAEL, THEN THERE
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 00181 03 OF 03 101629Z

WOULD BE NO PROBLEM. THE CONVERSATION BECAME HEATED WHEN
PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD SAID "AMERICAN JEWS ARE MORE LOYAL TO
ISRAEL THAN TO THE UNITED STATES." BINGHAM RESPONDED:
"I CERTAINLY DO NOT APPRECIATE THE PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS
ABOUT THE LOYALTY OF AMERICAN JEWS TO THE US." ASSAD
CLARIFIED HIS POSITION SAYING THAT "HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR
JEWISH PRESSURE IN THE US AGAINST ARABS, SYRIAN-US
RELATIONS WOULD BE MUCH BETTER...DO NOT MISUNDERSTAND
ME, I AM NOT A RELIGIOUS FANATIC." THEN HE PROCEEDED TO
DEFEND SYRIA'S RECORD OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM. REPRESENTATIVE
GILMAN ELOQUENTLY SUPPORTED BINGHAM'S CONCERN, POINTING
OUT THAT AMERICANS OF MANY NATIONAL ORIGINS HAVE
TIES TO THEIR MOTHER LANDS BUT THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY
ARE DISLOYAL TO THE US.

14. A LARGE PART OF THE CONVERSATION REVOLVED AROUND TREAT-
MENT OF SYRIAN JEWS AND BEHAVIOR OF US JEWS WITH ASSAD
DEFENDING SYRIA'S RECORD AND CODEL CALLING FOR A HUMANITARIAN
VIEW OF SYRIAN JEWISH REQUIREMENTS. IN CONCLUSION,
REPRESENTATIVE DODD STRESSED THE NEED FOR INCREASED LEVEL
OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES AND CALLED FOR
GREATER EXCHANGES. THE PRESIDENT ASSURED CODEL HE WOULD
SUPPORT ANY PROGRAM DESIGNED TO ACHIEVE THIS.

15. IN SUM, CODEL WAS TREATED TO AN UNVARNISHED PICTURE OF
SYRIAN ANXIETIES AND CONVICTIONS ABOUT PEACE PROCESS.
NEITHER THE SYRIAN LEADERSHIP NOR CODEL PULLED THEIR
PUNCHES. STRESS FROM BOTH SIDES WAS ON CONTINUING AND INCREASING
THE NUMBER OF SYRO-US CONTACTS TO ELIMINATE IGNORANCE AND
MISINTERPRETATION ON BOTH SIDES. SYRIANS FREELY
ADMITTED THAT THEY ARE NOT POLISHED PRACTITIONERS OF THE
ART OF PUBLIC RELATIONS. CODEL EXPRESSED TO US ON LEAVING
MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT THEIR MEETINGS HERE, APPRECIATIVE
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 00181 03 OF 03 101629Z

OF THE CANDOR AND FRANKNESS OF THE SYRIANS YET DEEPLY
CONCERNED AND PUZZLED BY SYRIA'S REJECTION OF SADAT'S EFFORTS
AND BY THE APPARENT HATRED FOR ISRAEL.
MURPHY

NOTE BY OC/T: PARA 13 AS RECEIVED.

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